

Proverbs Week #152 (14:10-13) Part 2

The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy. The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish. There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end in the way of death. Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief. (Proverbs 14:10–13 NAS95)



Last week I taught about joy and sorrow. This week I want to focus on the middle portion of these four verses and talk about the idea of making right plans. A famous motivational speaker has coined the phrase “begin with the end in mind” as one of his “habits of highly effective people.”¹ His writings on this subject help us to unpack the words of verse 12 above. If there are ways that seem right to us but in the end are really ways of death, we need to learn to discern what we are doing in the here and now and follow those things that don’t just seem to be right but actually are right. We want things that in the end will be filled with joy and not sorrow. What we seek when we seek wisdom is a fuller understanding of the ways that God has defined as right.

To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; (Proverbs

1:3 NAS95)

When we think of our four stated goals (to learn, to discern, **to receive**, to impart) our emphasis today is on the receiving goal. First, we are told that the plans (instructions) we are to receive are “in wise behavior.” The Hebrew word used here comes from the root *sekal* שָׂכַל. “The general usage of the vb. has various senses, especially: to understand (Isa 44:18), to have insight (Jer 9:23), and to be wise (Prov 15:24). It can often focus on the results of having insight, e.g., wise dealing (1:3), instruction (21:11), good skill (2 Chron 30:22), judicious speech (Prov 16:23), prudent action (10:5, 19), success (1 Sam 18:5), and prosperity (Prov 17:8). The nom. form has the sense of being wise (1 Sam 25:3), having good sense (Prov 19:11) and insight (12:8), with favorable effects (3:4). It can also have a negative sense (cunning, Dan 8:25).”² Having insight is demonstrated by making good choices. This lines up with our next descriptive word “righteousness.” Being right has everything to do with our standards. If, as in our verse, we are the standard for right and wrong then it is possible to think we are right and not be right at all. Our third and fourth words “justice and equity” extend righteousness and wisdom to our families and community. Being just and fair in how we treat each other results from not only knowing the right things to do but consistently doing them.



Will the “houses” we build (our families and communities) look like this one in the end? As we learn and grow in wisdom we can ensure not only our own welfare but also the success of future generations. Because of God’s grace we can learn to be wise. We must continue to trust in Him and lean on Him for His standards of right living. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Today’s verses add to our learning and growing in wisdom if we effectively hear what they are teaching.

¹ Stephen Covey in “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”

² VanGemeren, Willem A., ed. The New International Dictionary Of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis. Accordance electronic edition, version 2.2. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.